



## Scan and Review of Youth Development Measurement Tools

In 2012, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched its Policy on Youth in Development that strengthens and expands high-quality youth programming by the Agency, as well as calls for increased rigor in the evaluation of such programs. To support better research on youth development, USAID's Education Office asked JBS International, Inc. to scan and review tools designed to measure developmental assets,<sup>1</sup> workforce readiness skills, and life skills – all areas identified as key stepping stones for young people to achieve positive life outcomes, particularly gainful employment.

The search included collecting measurement tools through outreach to youth serving organizations and researchers, as well as a scan of organization websites and resource repositories. Tools found measured assets and skills, including:

- ✓ communication, daily living, and work/study skills
- ✓ money management
- ✓ career planning
- ✓ self-confidence
- ✓ managing emotions
- ✓ personal responsibility
- ✓ respecting self and others
- ✓ team work
- ✓ creative thinking
- ✓ problem solving
- ✓ decision making
- ✓ conflict management

A list of close to 50 measurement tools was reduced down to 15 based on a number of factors including: 1) the tool's

relevancy to the main topic areas of interest to USAID (e.g., positive youth development, workforce readiness, conflict mitigation); 2) expected ease of implementation; 3) previous history of use in developing countries, 4) whether the tool had been used for youth assessments or evaluations; and 5) whether the tool was recommended specifically by an implementer or researcher.

An expert panel was then brought together to formally review the top tools. They discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the tools based on a set of questions posed to help think about issues such as validity, reliability, user-friendliness, cost, and availability. The expert panel then met with staff from the USAID Office of Education to consider the challenges of measuring youth development outcomes in developing countries. The group deliberated on the pros and cons of USAID making additional investments in existing tools (e.g., reliability and validity testing) and/or adapting components of existing tools to measure an identified set of core developmental assets, workforce readiness skills, and life skills of importance across Agency youth programs. The meeting led to a discussion of possible next steps for USAID as they continue to work toward the goal of improved research and evaluation in youth development. At this point, USAID is meeting internally and with stakeholders to discuss the best steps forward for a new measurement approach.

### Measurement Issues and Challenges

A number of issues and challenges faced by USAID and others interested in measuring youth development in developing countries were identified during this review process, including:



<sup>1</sup> A set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults (Search Institute, 2013): <http://www.search-institute.org/research/developmental-assets>

**1. The lack of youth development measurement tools applied and tested in international settings.** Of the 47 tools scanned, only 10 had actually been applied in developing country settings and less than a handful had publicly available reliability and validity testing data. Reviewers discussed that because many internationally applied measurement tools are 'homegrown' or developed for use specifically by organizations implementing programs, they may not have been formally tested or if they were, the results may not be publicly available.

**2. The tension between adapting measurement tools to various cultures, while trying to maintain comparability.**

Most of the tools scanned and reviewed for this study were developed and used only in the U.S. During discussions with the expert panel it was noted that those tools may have items that are difficult to adapt to developing country settings. Some of the items may not translate well culturally in terms of meaning and others could be considered as 'sensitive' topic-wise. Even adapting a tool used in one developing country for use in another is not always easy, as meaning and interpretations differ. Unfortunately, adjusting items on measurement tools to adapt to local country contexts may limit the amount of comparison that can be made in an aggregate data analysis.

**3. The fact that most youth development measurement tools rely only on youth self-report.** While a couple of the measurement tools scanned for this study had separate instruments for parents/caregivers or teachers/staff to also provide their observations, the majority of the questionnaires relied only on youth to report their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The expert reviewers noted that, in addition to gathering data from parents, caregivers, or teachers, one way to triangulate information is to collect both quantitative data (via implementation of the selected measurement tool) and qualitative data (normally collected via interview or focus group) from youth.

Likewise, depending on what concepts/skills are being measured, researcher observation or other objective measures can be used (e.g., documentation such as a paycheck or test report). Newer techniques with youth include using interactive games that document young people's reactions and behaviors in response to prompts.

**4. The difficulty of measuring economic outcomes for youth in developing countries.** During the meeting of the expert panel, two reviewers specifically discussed the difficulties in measuring economic outcomes for youth. One reviewer stated that from their experience, "even when asked, youth do not always know how much they make or if they make more

now than they did before." Another reviewer also said that, "youth also don't consistently understand the concept of 'quality' of employment" or the notion of a job that has benefits, support, and training. This is why some researchers are now more interested in measuring consumption than economic outcomes.



## Conclusions

In its recent *State of the Field Report: Holistic, Cross-sectoral Youth Development*, USAID acknowledged that having a clear set of useful measures that can be used in developing country contexts is needed to move the research forward in this area. While there are certainly issues and challenges to be thought through with regards to measurement, there are also clearly a number of strong tools available that measure concepts of interest to USAID that could be considered for use or adaptation in its assessment and evaluation work.

Continued work in this area would benefit from collaboration with implementers and researchers, since both types of organizations are developing and using measurement tools on youth development. It would also be worthwhile to work closely with other donors on this topic to prevent duplication of efforts and encourage consistency. Because of its continued work on issues of importance to youth, USAID has the opportunity to take a leadership role in moving the field forward to fill in the gaps on measuring youth development outcomes.